



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Public Instruction  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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\*\*\* NEWS RELEASE \*\*\*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Patrick Gasper, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

## DPI helps schools assist families impacted by economic crisis

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster announced that the Department of Public Instruction is providing resources, strategies, and support to Wisconsin schools that wish to assist families impacted by the economic crisis. An eight-page document, *Resources and Strategies to Assist Families Experiencing Challenges Related to the Economic Recession*, viewable at [http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/doc/serv\\_for\\_families\\_08.doc](http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/doc/serv_for_families_08.doc), has been distributed to educators statewide. Department staff are also available to provide support to any school district wishing to implement those ideas.

“Wisconsin, along with the rest of the nation, is experiencing very difficult economic times,” said Burmaster. “Parents often share their concerns and challenges with their children’s teachers and principals, which is why it is so important for educators to know about the resources that exist and learn other ways to assist struggling families.”

Hunger and homelessness in Wisconsin have been on the rise since before the recession began. The percentage of students in poverty, as measured by their eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals, is now at 35 percent statewide. This figure, drawn from 2008-09 school year data, marks a two-percent increase since the previous school year and a six-percent increase over the previous five years. The issue affects rural, suburban, and urban districts: for example, the rate is 73 percent in Bayfield, 50 percent in Green Bay, 48 percent in Madison, and 79 percent in Milwaukee.

The increase in homelessness among students is even more dramatic: the number of students experiencing homelessness went up 74 percent over the five years for which data is available: from 5,358 students in the 2003-04 school year to 9,327 in 2007-08. The one-year increase from 2006-07 to 2007-08 was 1,223 students, or 15 percent.

*Resources and Strategies to Assist Families Experiencing Challenges Related to the Economic Recession* was compiled by an interdisciplinary team of professionals at the agency, led by staff in the School and Community Nutrition Teams and the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. Concerned

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neighbors and educators will find helpful links, ideas, and funding sources organized into 16 categories, ranging from Basic Needs to Community Education Programs to Food.

The document includes live links to community and Internet resources. It has been mailed to every school district administrator in Wisconsin, in addition to educators who specialize in food and nutrition; homeless education; nursing; social work; special education; tobacco, drug, and alcohol use prevention; and other areas. Notice of the document was also recently included in Burmaster's electronic newsletter for educators and friends of education, *SEAchange*.

One strategy on the list is also featured in a new DPI YouTube video: the idea of creating a "Family Closet" where parents can donate children's clothing they no longer need, and partake of items dropped off by other families.

To call attention to the growing problem of homelessness among students, DPI staff have also assisted with the production of "Teens and Homelessness," an episode of the call-in television program for youth, *Teen Connection*, airing March 24, 8:00 p.m. on the Wisconsin Public Television network. The program is produced by the network along with NEWIST/CESA 7 and Educational Television Productions of Northeastern Wisconsin.

"Educators in Wisconsin work very hard to ensure that students have the opportunity to graduate ready to succeed in the 21st century," said Burmaster. "Part of enabling a child to learn is helping to make sure that outside challenges don't get in the way."

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NOTES: This news release is available electronically at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/prmenu.html>. *Resources and Strategies to Assist Families Experiencing Challenges Related to the Economic Recession* is viewable at [http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/doc/serv\\_for\\_families\\_08.doc](http://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/doc/serv_for_families_08.doc). The DPI web video, *Family Closet at School*, is viewable at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYkxtumGDAs>.